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- ART. IV.—1. *Peg Woffington. A Novel.* By CHARLES READE. London. 1852. Boston: Ticknor and Fields. 1855. 12mo. pp. 303.
2. *Christie Johnstone. A Novel.* By CHARLES READE. Boston: Ticknor and Fields. 1855. 12mo. pp. 309.
3. *Clouds and Sunshine. And Art: a Dramatic Tale.* By CHARLES READE. Boston: Ticknor and Fields. 1855. 12mo. pp. 288.

WHY does any man write a book? Why has Mr. Charles Reade written three books? When we know exactly what an author aims at, we have a specific standard by which to judge of the excellence of the performance; but when his purpose is so obscurely shadowed forth, as to leave the most painstaking reader in doubt whether he has any definite object, the book can be judged only by the general impressions it produces, its obvious moral tendency, and the skill shown in its construction as a work of art. We may thus misjudge the author's intention, but shall perhaps arrive at a truer valuation of his work, because, not being in his secret, we shall not incur the risk of being misled by any fancied connection between the mark and the precision of the shot. Had it not been for a brief note appended to the second of Mr. Reade's novels, we should have honestly concluded, that, having acquired some facility in pencraft as a playwright, (in which branch of literature we believe he has met with marked success in but one instance,) he had shrewdly determined to abandon the circumscribed honors of the stage, and to direct his talents to the gratification of that larger audience, the reading public, with the simple, but perfectly laudable, design of improving his financial affairs. After giving to his four dramas, "novels by courtesy," a more thorough reading than usually falls to works of this class, we arrived at the above as the only adequate answer to the question, Why has Mr. Charles Reade written three books?

Our author is by no means deficient in a certain kind of talent, of the temporarily attractive species. He occasionally exhibits felicitous *tableaux*, which interest and fix the atten-

tion for the moment, in much the same manner as a panoramic or stage scene, but which unfortunately glide from the mind as easily as scenic representations do from the eye. Sometimes also, we may meet with a whole philosophical essay condensed into two or three lines, as thus: "Lord Ipsden started [in life] with nothing to win; and naturally lived for amusement. Now nothing is so sure to cease to please, as pleasure; to amuse, as amusement." But having spent some hours in the company of his *dramatis personæ*, which we could hardly have done had there been no ripples of wit, no happy reminiscences, no well-told incidents, we were on the whole disappointed. Though one of the heroines was piquant in repartee, large-hearted, and a capital dinner-companion; though another was shrewd and strong-handed, and brought with her the muscle-bracing smell of tarred ropes, fish, and sea-breezes; though a third "stood like Ruth amid the golden corn," the living epitome of all the imputed sins, the actual sorrows, and the checkered joys of virtue, pride, and poverty combined; and though their masculine admirers talked of truth in art, of the "earnest men of the past" *versus* the present, of love and intrigue with their *et cætera* of folly and dissimulation; yet none were of so rare a beauty, so unique in thought and manner (excepting perhaps Christie), so powerful in argument, so thrilling in passion or in eloquence, as to furnish a reasonable excuse for forcing three new books upon the public.

Why then review them, if they have no special claim on public attention, and no peculiar merit? For two or three reasons. First, because the high character of their American publishers will give them a large circulation, and consequently some influence on the general taste. They have also been very generally noticed with favor by the newspaper press, which will insure for them a still wider circulation. Moreover, though not superior in design or execution to many other books of the same class, they contain hints and suggestions worth our heed, if not new, and some local sketches racy and piquant, drawn with a free and bold hand, and with a truth to nature which gives promise of better things to come, and assures us that Mr. Reade could have done better than he has

done with a little more patience in details, and the cultivation of a little more delicacy of ear and eye, which would give him a power he lacks, or at least has failed to show,— nice discrimination of the finer shades of feeling.

We suspect one reason for the general favor which these books have met with from the newspaper press is, that the tales are short, and easily despatched,— the very thing for a man to take up as a gentle mental recreation after the severer labors of his profession.

Mr. Reade is eminently dramatic in his style. His *forte* is action, not narration. He groups his characters in a succession of amusing, pathetic, or semi-tragical scenes, which would require but little alteration or pruning to fit them for the stage. But from these artistic pictures the reader must draw his own deductions, and learn what lessons he may, but with little aid from the author; who gives us the results of correct observation, so far as they can be derived from externals, but indulges in no abstract speculation or metaphysical analysis. We find here none of that exquisite mental anatomy which we shudderingly admire in writers like Hawthorne, who cut at once, boldly and deeply, into the very vitals of their subject, and then, successively taking up with the nicest skill each separate and sensitive nerve, trace its ramifications through the system, keep it exposed to view, while with merciless *sang froid*, these masters of their art dilate upon its natural or morbid diagnosis, show its intimate connection with distant and scarce distinguishable fibres of sensation, point out their origin in heart or brain, and then follow them on in a spirit of equal intensity and truth to their necessary terminus,— a terminus of passional or intellectual action. Mr. Reade has none of that freezing precision, that unerring accuracy of delineation, which leaves the impression that the writer has actually been present at the dissection of a human soul, has looked into the interior machinery of existence, and which makes us fear, while the fancy lasts, that the power of the word-artist may have been bestowed upon the living creatures that surround us, so that they may read us, as we have read his victims.

Mr. Reade's scenes are too limited to make us at home in

them; his characters are too sketchy for us to feel familiarly conversant with them. His men and women do not seem to us as life-companions, but rather as passing acquaintances, whom we have met at a dinner-party, in a rail-car, or at a watering-place; with whom we have passed a pleasant hour or two, but of whom we do not know enough to put them upon our list of assured friends; nor have they that innate power of fascination which enables them, as a transient acquaintance sometimes will, to cling to the memory *nolens volens*. Instead of this, we perceive that they will soon yield place to successive visitors of nearly the same calibre, and we think no more about them. Even Christie Johnstone, the freshest and least hackneyed character, appears, after the interval of a week, not as a whole and well-defined woman; but we see in the retrospect only a strong arm, linked to a voice with a singular local *patois*, with now and then a whiff of not over-fresh herrings; while brilliant Peg Woffington, sweet Mabel Vane, and sorrow-bleached Rachael, have all become airy phantoms, undistinguishable amid the numerous successors to public favor that have appeared since their advent, from the English and American press.

Was such temporary effect as this the narrow ambition of the author? And if he fails to imprint his characters deeply upon the minds of his readers, is it his fault, in being too sketchy and sententious, or his misfortune, in being compelled to appear with his little troupe among a crowd of jealous competitors? Perhaps both. The day has gone by when the announcement of a new novel can create any unwonted excitement. Expectation palls at the heaps of fictitious works which load the shelves of booksellers, and the public, like gourmands, have become fastidious through repletion, so that what would have been hailed as a miracle of art, standing at the distance of six months or a year from any rival production, is now snubbed and thrown aside as a mere daub; its merits being judged, wholly or partially, from the tinge it has acquired, through too close a proximity, perhaps, to those of more brilliant coloring, and especially from that confusing effect which results from an indiscriminate blending of objects, when a greater number are presented to the eye than that

organ can clearly define and individualize. It becomes an author to bear this fact in mind, and not to content himself with positive merits merely; he must be prepared to submit to the various degrees of comparison with which an overstocked market has furnished readers and critics. Happy he who reaches the superlative in the ascending scale!

Had Mr. Reade written only to amuse, he would neither have disappointed his readers nor stultified himself; but in one of his books, "Christie Johnstone," he gives us to understand that he has a "great error to destroy, and a great truth to establish." The error to be demolished is, so far as we can infer from the story, that of admiring and regretting the past, to the detraction of the present; the truth to be established, that Nature's moods are to be learned only from herself, and that they may in no wise be studied through artificial mediums, or trusted to the imagination or memory, be the one never so active, the other never so retentive, or be the imitation never so rarely executed. This is the professed purpose; but the reasoning in behalf of these propositions, and the incidents which go to sustain them, bearing about as much proportion to the story as the epilogue to a five-act play, the meritorious design will, of a surety, escape the perception of the great majority of readers, who need more than a quiet incidental suggestion, and are not likely to be converted by a succinct logical syllogism. To knock away their preconceived, and probably crude, notions of past centuries, neither a piquant epigram, nor a practical joke, will suffice; much less will these agencies prove potent in rearing the fabric of a juster formula of belief. The mass of readers, especially of novel-readers, will more readily fall beneath a succession of small shot, than by a single round of heavy artillery. In other words, they must be made to absorb ideas without being put to the trouble of deciding between antagonists, or even of thinking. Here Mr. Reade errs. He demolishes Carlyle and the Middle Ages in little more than a single page, and establishes truth in art in about twice as many paragraphs. Would he successfully teach truth through fiction, he must be less reliant on the sagacity of his readers. Sideway hints will answer only for the few; the mass will never learn, from a brief

glance in the right direction by one character, a transient, though noble impulse in another, and an accidental lapse into truth and goodness by a third. To those who are awake to the subject, it may be quite enough to say, "that painting out-of-doors scenery in doors is a great lie"; but the large proportion of readers who are not accustomed to do their own thinking will be inclined to ask Mr. Reade, how and why it is a "lie." If a tree looks like a tree (that is like other trees in other pictures), what matters it whether it was painted in a darkened studio, or in the presence of the very tree which it was designed to represent? Neither is it convincing to the understanding, to say of a given hero, "that he had great force and weight of character," when the whole plot goes to show that he was the creature of circumstances, like Robert Hathorn, ready to do what his father bade him one hour, what the family agreed upon the next, and what his heart dictated at last,—not because of his heart, but through the unsought magnanimity of a third party.

Modern fictions, we know, are expected to do, not only their own legitimate work, but also that of the hard, dry, voluminous treatises on philosophy and morals of former times; they are expected to supply the place of legislators and divines, to obviate the necessity for polemical essays and political pamphlets, in short, to perform all the functions which the several departments of literature could scarcely accomplish half a century ago. This, then, being their acknowledged "mission," they should at least undergo careful elaboration in the portrayal of character; the specialty to be engrafted should be so interwoven into the texture of the whole as to be inseparable from it, and, without being made offensively prominent, the main idea of the author should so flavor his work, that the careless should imbibe his spirit without knowing how they received illumination, while the painstaking reader would be rewarded by finding himself, at the close, furnished with a whole armory of weapons with which to demolish the antagonistic force. Not so works Mr. Reade. A large percentage of his readers will never guess that he has any serious antagonism in view.

We can perhaps illustrate what we mean by this deficiency

of style, this failure to sustain his own thought, by comparing Mr. Reade with that greatest of English prose-poets, Charles Dickens. To express a certain state of mind, the author of *Christie Johnstone* says, truly and sententiously: "Our minds are so constituted, that, when we are guilty, we fear that others know what we know." How soon is the bare assertion of such a law forgotten! But who would ever forget it, that had read the amplified illustration of this truth in the minute description of the feelings of Jonas Chuzzlewit after his murder of Tigg? There, in his agonizing watch over all things animate and inanimate, we have the very daguerreotype of dreaded detection. A readable novel in one small volume is certainly a desideratum in this book-bewildered generation, but we think any one would prefer to read two pages for one, if he could thereby transfer to his mind an image worth preserving; and that ought to be worth preserving which was worth creating,—it is poor economy, and worse taste, to leave a picture unfinished for the sake of sparing the paint.

Mr. Reade barely escapes justifying his own verdict on himself. "I will evaporate," he says, "in thin generalities." But fortunately he has not been quite true to this determination. Had he been so, all memory of himself and his works would evaporate from popular consideration much sooner than it is destined to do, for, despite the general unimpressibility of his characters, he has shown in those of Peg Woffington and Rose Mayfield a perfect ability to work out a complete and living character, whenever he shall take the trouble to do so. Had he followed these personages up more leisurely, he might have given to the human naturalist a new species of the genus feminine. The portrait of Rose, who is described as "not an angel, but a female, with decided virtues and abominable faults," shows that Mr. Reade has not wholly misread the state of mind in which women of a kindly nature, but deficient in will, are sometimes wooed and won. "A woman," says he, "knows by experience, that it is the fate of a woman not to do what she would like, and to do just what she would rather not, and often, though apparently free, to be fettered by sundry cobwebs, and driven into some unwelcome corner, by divers whips of gossamer." Thus was Rose Mayfield entangled.



In plot Mr. Reade has struck out nothing new. The *dénouement* in "Peg Woffington" turns on the exposure of Mr. Vane, a gentleman who comes up to London on business, and there falls in love with the actress Peg, totally ignoring the fact, that he has left a young and devoted wife in Shropshire. That injured lady recurs to his remembrance only on her sudden and unexpected appearance at her husband's house in Bloomsbury Square, unfortunately just at the moment when that inconstant gentleman was giving a dinner-party in honor of his Thespian flame.

"Art," distinguished by the author as a "dramatic tale," though it has certainly less of the elements of a drama than either of the others, is the old story repeated, which, with slight variations, has occasionally appeared since English novel-writing was a craft. A young man destined to the bar by a plodding, "common-sense" father, incontinently demolishes the paternal hopes, by neglecting the Inns of Court, turning versifier, and consummating his lunacy by the anonymous wooing of his "bright particular star," who was just then illuminating the boards of Old Drury. This is all stale enough; but the groundwork of the plot is relieved by the truly professional mode by which the youth's illusion was finally dispelled.

In "Clouds and Sunshine" we have the hackneyed theme of a poor, but of course beautiful girl, being inveigled into a false marriage with a rich rascal, who soon deserts her, she living ever after on her pride, seasoned with a little work; until the unmerited sorrows of years are healed (?) by her subsequent marriage with a well-to-do, but rather sheepish, young yeoman.

All the plots, in fact, are old; but in Christie Johnstone the *locale* of the drama gives to the story an air of freshness which the others sadly lack. She not only comes to us in a picturesque costume, and a strange provincial dialect, which adds piquancy to the *naïveté* of her conversation; but her strong native sense, combined as it is with physical labors never performed by women except in peculiar localities, and a certain degree of independence, does not appear out of character (though her penchant for Shakespeare certainly does),

the edge of her wit, doubtless, being sharpened by the exercise of her calling as a Newhaven fishwife. It is, however, in this tale that the trite idea is embodied of an ennuied lord seeking adventures among the "lower orders" as an untried source of excitement,—a thought which has afforded frequent and successful scope to the novelist's pen.

Not only have all the principal themes of these tales been well and variously handled by preceding writers; but there is much less diversity between the different tales themselves than we should expect to find, in books issued in such close succession from the same hand. Both Peg Woffington and Rose Mayfield appear in the attitude of rivals, and both emerge from that trying position most charmingly. Gatty, the lover of Christie Johnstone, is made miserable by the necessity of breaking with her, or being broken down himself, imposed upon him by the importunities of his very vulgar mother; while Alexander Oldworthy is no less pertinaciously beset by his unpoetical father, who commands him to cease from his vain adoration of Anne Oldfield.

One peculiarity of Mr. Reade is his perpetual tendency to a precipitation of *dénouements*, which has probably arisen from habits acquired in writing for the stage, where it is imperatively demanded that the parties introduced be left, at the close of each scene, in an attractive attitude before the audience. His male characters are unsatisfactory. They are all bad or weak. Lord Ipsden, the best of them, appears totally destitute of any innate force of character, and takes to benevolence and alms-giving as a specific for unrequited love. The additional spice of adventure which grows out of this curative process is to be attributed, we should think, rather to returning health and animal spirits, than to any deliberate and well-considered principle of action. Indeed, the lady of his choice had refused his hand for the very reason "that he had neither vices nor virtues,—never had done anything, nor, in her opinion, ever would do anything." She, the Lady Barbara Sinclair, had got beyond the romance of the Adonis age, and was "on the look out for iron virtues," without, it seems, having sufficiently considered whether great deeds are always to be got at, however disposed thereto a lover may be. Be

that as it may, she had "vowed to be wooed with great deeds, or never won." In the sequel, Lord Ipsden, under the impetus of the following prescription from Dr. Aberford (whose picture we suspect is meant for a portrait of the celebrated Dr. Abernethy), starts on a series of yacht adventures in the Frith of Forth. Here is the prescription :—

"Make acquaintance with all the people of low estate who have time to be bothered with you ; learn their ways, their minds, and, above all, their troubles."

In pursuance of this sensible *adventure-pathic* advice, Lord Ipsden makes the acquaintance of Christie Johnstone, under the following circumstances. Having arrived at his lodgings in Newhaven, he thus appeals to his servant :—

"'Saunders ! do you know what Dr. Aberford means by the lower classes ?'

"' Perfectly, my Lord.'

"' Are there any about here ?'

"' I am sorry to say they are everywhere, my Lord.'

"' Get me some.'— (*Cigarette.*)"

The obedient lackey presently returns with two fisherwomen, one of whom, who proves to be Christie, is described as "fair, with a massive but shapely throat, as white as milk ; glossy brown hair, the loose threads of which glittered like gold, and a blue eye, which, being contrasted with dark eyebrows and lashes, took the luminous effect peculiar to that rare beauty."

Through the whole series, there appears a disposition to elevate the "lower orders" at the expense of the higher. And to this disposition, by no means limited to Mr. Reade, we enter our decided protest. Because Dickens and Jerrold have shown that virtue is extant in St. Giles, does it follow that there is none at the West End ? This kind of exhibition lacks sincerity. Has Mr. Reade faith enough in his social theory to choose his own associates from the classes he so lauds ? If not, have we not a right to complain that he should yield to the fashionable cant of philanthropy, which makes it necessary to pick up a heroine from the gutters, in order that she may be presentable in the existing mood of the

ever-changing public? Not that our author has descended quite so low, he having contented himself on the descending scale with a harvest-tide reaper and a Newhaven fishwife; but where persons of the different *classes* (we use the word as he uses it, in reference to English society) come in collision, the poorer and least educated are represented as the more sensible, charming, and eloquent. The educated, rich, and refined circle in which Lord Ipsden naturally moves, "talk twaddle," while a party of herring-fishermen, their wives and sweethearts, listen in rapt attention to a new version of "The Merchant of Venice," improvised by one of their number! With all due respect to Mr. Reade, we call *that* "twaddle," and, moreover, begin to suspect that his acquaintance with either the "upper" or "lower" orders of society has been very limited, if not altogether imaginary. Is such experience true to nature? If so, it is such nature as we have never seen. Virtue we have found among the poor, strong native sense too, and sometimes an unwonted delicacy of feeling; but these are rare, very rare, exceptional cases, for poverty has no natural tendency to refine the mind. Yet all these traits, if not absolutely common among the upper circles of society, are too frequent to excite attention, much less surprise. Our words may seem undemocratic, to those who have not thought much upon this peculiar tendency of modern fiction; but they are true, and as philosophical as true. The senses must be gratified to a certain extent before the mind can be opened to æsthetic pleasures or mental culture. Even morals cannot flourish below a certain degree of poverty. Hunger makes men ferocious, and the brutalization of the human race, within or without the pale of civilization, is in the exact ratio of their physical wretchedness, every change in the physical condition bearing its legitimate fruits in the corresponding condition of the mind. In this country we fortunately have no permanent class which answers to Mr. Reade's "lower orders," because here poverty and ignorance, though too frequently, are not necessarily combined, and, from the mutability of fortunes, few families retain the same position in society for more than two or three generations. Hence that stolid obtuseness of intellect found among the English

peasantry, arising from the fixed condition of themselves and their ancestors, has no counterpart among our laboring population, whose fathers may have been Generals or Governors, and whose sons may become millionnaires. But poverty in Great Britain — Mr. Reade's domain — implies ignorance, want of refinement, an hereditary coarseness of taste and manner; and however desirous we may be of divesting the *tiers état* of its normal state, words will not do it; ignorance must produce its legitimate results, — narrow minds and intractable wills.

Neither in physiological description is Mr. Reade more true to nature. Real life does not produce "lovely women with throats of snowy whiteness," who have been all their lives long exposed to the elements in a Northern climate, engaged in the rough labors of the herring-fishery, or even among those who have wrought for years with the sickle in the field.

But fashions are not confined to changes in costume, to styles of architecture, to French upholstery, dancers, or singing-women. Not only do we travel, fight, and farm differently from our ancestors, and worship God under an improved creed, but we sigh on a new scale, set philanthropy to new tunes, — and write books for every imaginable purpose but the ostensible one. There is a fashion in scribbling, as in everything else. The modern novel is a totally different thing from the old-fashioned novel. The Fielding, Radcliffe, and Scott schools are extinct, superseded by the ultra-philanthropic. The sentimentalists have been driven from the field by the promulgators of a sentiment. Modern fiction is directed to the formation of opinion, and scorns the reward of the old romancers, — the sympathy of tears. The general aim also of the latest novelists, in which Mr. Reade conspires, is to direct attention to classes, rather than to individuals; a more noble aim, if executed in a truthful spirit, but highly mischievous, if it conveys false ideas, and creates, as it then must, class prejudices. The latest edict of fashion not only prescribes this, however, but demands that the lower strata should be taken up on the united pen-points of the novel-writing brotherhood, and elevated, per force, to the level of

the upper. Would that the real process of elevation involved no more than this!

But class-adulation, under the guise of large-hearted philanthropy, is the natural product of awakened consciences, suddenly roused from a guilty apathy to remorseful enthusiasm, which the fashionable novel not only echoes, but encourages and intensifies. It is inadmissible now, to connect wealth and learning with goodness and intelligence. The business of the modern novelist is to distort and disfigure the "upper circles," to paint them as sordid, heartless, and inane. We may no longer be permitted through the pages of romance to love and sympathize with those whom we should naturally choose for associates in real life. The virtues, if we may believe these writers, have all been precipitated, and are found only in the dregs. The novelist of to-day dives, rather than soars, in search of honor, honesty, and refinement; and that wielder of the pen will find himself *de trop*, who imagines he can palm off accomplished young ladies, and college-bred gentlemen, as fit objects of interest for this enlightened generation. Fallen women, inebriates and their victims, the guilty, the slaves of passion, the slaves of toil, and, above all, the slave *par excellence*, the slave of whips and chains, are the savory dishes which alone can satisfy the present epicurean taste for misery and groans. So far as these may have tended to the amelioration of the condition of the poor, to the rescue of the vice-degraded, and to the infusion of truer principles in regard to the great social problems of the day, we give them all praise; but we would that the incentives to such endeavors had been more generally offered in a spirit of truth, and without ministering to class-prejudices. Yet a flood of second and third rate novelists — imitators of Sue and Dickens, but without their genius — have attempted to reverse the decrees of Providence, and, not content with depicting subterranean, alley, and attic life as it is, and portraying depravity — no matter how produced — in its own repulsive colors, must needs invest it with those factitious, but agreeable endowments of superior beauty, wit, elegance, and refinement of manner, which can come only from careful culture. We object to such wholesale misrepresentation of facts, and to the

theory involved in it, believing that the innate goodness of man is developed under favorable circumstances, and not often otherwise, that vicious surroundings produce vicious characters, that physical degradation is indissolubly linked with its concomitants in the mental and moral realms, that exalted sentiments are not the invariable and natural adjuncts of unwashed faces, much less that they are monopolized by the unclean, and that, though a pure moral atmosphere may fail to produce Catos and Scipios, the reverse is still less likely to produce them.

Of all literary fictions, that of an imagined superiority in the minds and hearts of the socially degraded is the most absurd and transparent, as any one may ascertain by experimenting on living subjects. It is not only untrue, but it is practically unjust. Is it the "lower orders" who think for themselves and one another, — who devise systems of sanitary reform, — who so contrive the disposal of their children's time as to secure for them the elements of school education? No; the greatest difficulty which the benevolent wealthy among Mr. Reade's countrymen find, in carrying out reformatory schemes among their home population, is the total indisposition among the lower orders to co-operate with them — if such co-operation involve any self-denial or exertion — for the sake of elevating themselves or their children in the social scale.

This theory may also be viewed in another aspect, — in its rebound. And here it has more direct application to ourselves. Class-adulation, when forced beyond the limits which actual contact and experience will justify, is the natural foundation for class-antipathy, — a difficult thing to manage anywhere, and especially perilous to a republic. People resent imposition in all shapes not of their own choosing; and that class-sympathy which grows into being under the stimulus of fictitious pictures of goodness and intelligence, where every law of morals and of social life bars its existence, will speedily melt away under the harsher but more truthful teachings of a real experience, hardening the heart of the amateur philanthropist in proportion as he finds he has been deceived. In illustration, have we not seen the growth of a new political party based on this latent antagonism to falsehood, — the obvious

reaction of a fulsome adulation of certain classes from which truth and good taste equally recoiled, awakening a dormant, but intense antipathy, and setting in motion extensive organizations which distinctly cultivate class-prejudices? All untruths sooner or later return to plague their inventors, and fiction itself, if not required precisely to teach truth, should at least indicate where it lies. It may be permitted to adorn truth, but never to distort or disfigure it.

We suspect there is a strong element of gratitude in Mr. Reade's character, which has led him to lay out his main strength in the illustration of that profession—the stage—by which he first became known to the literary world. In the persons of Peg Woffington and Anne Oldfield, he has given us two of the best sketches his pen has produced. Peg, from a little “orange-girl,” selling fruit between the acts to the frequenters of the pit, rises, through force of merit and perseverance, to the glory of a star of the second magnitude. Her peculiar gift seems to be that of outwitting not only her enemies, but, by way of amusement, her friends also. She is not only an actress off the stage, as well as on; she is represented as a woman of an exceedingly benevolent disposition, and not without some aspirations for a better life than that to which her profession almost condemns her. Her taste for private theatricals is eventually turned to good account, by her voluntarily enacting a little by-plot, through which she restores a deserted wife to the affections of her husband, and rids herself of a perjured suitor.

In a similar spirit our author represents Anne Oldfield as consenting, at the request of one Nathan Oldworthy, to act a part in her own house, by which she should disenchant his son Alexander, who, instead of giving his days and nights to Blackstone, spends his nights at Drury Lane, in the distant worship of the tragedian, and his days in writing sonnets to her praise. We confess the story would have been more effective had Mr. Reade selected a fictitious character, instead of one whose amours have been the theme of Betterton's historic pen. But the skill with which she administers the antidote, and the very possible adoption of such a plan by an actress, give a zest to the scene, which, did our space permit,



would well bear transcribing. Alexander, who had seen his goddess only on the stage, had invested her in his imagination with all the exalted attributes of tragic heroines, and with that beauty of face and form which stage-lights and careful costuming had been able to give her in his bewildered eyes. Having at last been admitted to the desired interview, in which, unknown to him, the actress had promised his father to "cure him," he thus awaits the auspicious moment:—

"Alexander was left alone, to all appearance; in reality, he was in a crowd,—a crowd of 'thick-coming fancies.' He was to breathe the same air as she, to be by her side, whom the world adored at a distance; he was to see her burst on him like the sun, and to feel more strongly than ever how far his verse fell short of the goddess who inspired it; he half wished to retreat from his too great happiness."

Instead of the splendid phenomenon, however, which he anticipated, Mrs. Oldfield enters disguised as a vulgar old woman; and so perfect is her impersonation of the character, that Alexander's "rainbow vision" is completely shattered. His pride is mortified; he is heart-sick with disappointment; "she had made him ten years older, than when, ten minutes before, he entered the room, all faith and poetry, and hope and love."

Triplet, "Painter, Actor, and Dramatist," as his cards proclaim him, is one of the most amusing and natural characters in the whole series,—a mediocre versifier and artist, who mistakes himself for a genius, and starves accordingly, until his good angel, Peg Woffington, becomes his patron and benefactor. And, by the way, it is worthy of remark, that although Mr. Reade sets out with the proposition, that "all young ladies' minds are but the mirrors of some masculine mind," he has done all that he could to controvert himself through his characters, his women invariably proving more capable, thoughtful, courageous, reasonable, and witty, as well as more moral, which perhaps was to be expected, than his men. Even poor Mrs. Triplet, the attenuated victim of her husband's mania for writing plays (which of course are never "brought out"), though confined to a third floor in Lambeth Street, shows a better knowledge of the world than does Triplet, who mingles daily with the people whose natures and habits he never learns.

Triplet is a type, not only of mediocre literati in general, living on ill-founded expectations and vanity, while their families waste away with the sickness of hope deferred; but also of that numerous tribe of persons, who, because they have some little talent for invention, or have been unfortunate enough to light upon a "discovery" without possessing the necessary tact to interest capitalists in their *eureka*, never receive even the encouragement and remuneration they merit, much less that unbounded success to which their vanity points. It must have fallen to the lot of most persons to have seen some poor wretch, like this Triplet, wasting his days on pictures that never sell, on books that are never printed, or on inventions whose only active application is to drain to utter exhaustion the resources of the inventor, whose pride, suggesting that he who is capable of such flights of genius is quite too *recherché* a spirit to be occupied in the drudgery of remunerative labor (which despised labor commonly is), continues to weary the ear of friendship with imaginary successes which never come, while his own life is made miserable with care and disappointment. The great error of this large fraternity in suffering is their obstinate refusal to turn, even temporarily, from their idols, for the purpose of acquiring in the more reliable pursuits of life sufficient means to be able to gratify themselves and to astound the world by the enlargement of their several fancies from the bondage of poverty and obscurity.

From the evident pleasure which the author takes in Triplet, we suspect him to be a study from real life. How he dilates on the feelings which animate the poor playwright when he contrives his ingenious plan for inducing the manager, Christopher Rich of Drury Lane, to read his three tragedies "with the least possible loss of time"! He proposes to arrange this important matter for his anticipated critic, first, by marking on the margin the most brilliant passages; and then, in the exuberance of his hope, and the grotesqueness of his nature, drawing the personages of his plots in their principal dramatic situations, each with a scroll issuing from his mouth containing the heroic verses which are to electrify the pit; and finally suggesting, "that, breakfast being a quiet meal," the

said tragedies might be examined "without disturbing the avocations of the day, by laying them at a convenient position on the table with the sugar-basin on the manuscript to keep it down"! As might be anticipated, no such weight was required; they sank under the inexorable law which precipitates bodies in the ratio of their density. Triplet has many counterparts.

When Mr. Reade seeks only to amuse, he succeeds admirably; his misfortune is, that he defends his favorite theories through his weakest characters. His champion of the Present is not a hero on principle, but is forced into adventure through the complaints of his mistress and the orders of his physician; takes up the offensive against the Past, only through the spur of jealousy; and fails even then to defeat his rival by force of argument, but rises to favor only on that gentleman's downfall through an act of arrant cowardice. The assailant of Carlyle should have been made of sterner stuff than Lord Ipsden.

So, too, the defender of truth in art, the artist Gatty, is weak and maudlin, — a man with whom it is impossible to sympathize; who talks well of pictures and of the new era in painting, which he is to introduce, but behaves like a poltroon to the unsuspecting and noble-hearted Christie, whom he secures at last for a wife, not through any effort of his own, but by a favorable concatenation of circumstances, the last of which is his rescue from drowning by Christie herself. Here is Gatty's portrait:—

"He had been so harassed backwards and forwards, that to him certainty was relief; *it was a great matter to be no longer called upon to decide.* His mother had said, 'Part,' and now Christie had said, 'Part': at least the affair was taken out of his hands, and his first feeling was a heavenly calm. [!] In this state he continued for about a mile, and he spoke to his mother about his Art, sole object now; but after the first mile he became silent, drait; Christie's pale face, her mortified air when her generous offer was coldly repulsed, filled him with remorse; finally, unable to bear it, yet not daring to speak, he broke suddenly from his mother, without a word, and ran wildly back to Newhaven; he looked back only once, and there stood his mother, pale, with her hands piteously lifted towards heaven. By the time he got to Newhaven he was as sorry for her as for Christie." Not quite, it seems, for

"he ran to the house of the latter. Flucker and Jean told him she was on the beach. He ran to the beach, where he presently saw her at the edge of the boats, in company with a gentleman in a boating dress. . . . . Gatty turned faint, sick ; for a moment everything swam before his eyes."

It is commonly supposed, and we believe correctly, that the social standing of a speaker, his mental calibre, his power of exciting personal sympathy, his known honor, integrity, and moral courage, all weigh in the balance against an adversary. What a pity that Mr. Reade should make such a rueful, pusillanimous wight as Gatty his spokesman in behalf of Truth and Nature !

In judging an author, we naturally fall back upon the impressions he has produced upon ourselves, and ask : Has he opened to us any new scenes in nature, brought us in contact with new orders of mind, touched the fountains of feeling, widened our charity, re-armed us for conflict with error, corrected our opinions, softened the heart, lifted the veil of Providence, inspired us with unwonted elevation of sentiment, encouraged our best aspirations, — has he done all, or any, of these things ? We are sorry to be obliged to answer, that, in regard to the most important of these objects, Mr. Reade utterly fails. There is little to improve either the mind, heart, or even style, in the books, the titles of which head this article. His best recommendation is, that he is amusing, and has introduced us, in "Christie Johnstone," to scenes not yet hackneyed in novel literature. So far as we can ascertain, without forcing a conclusion, both "Peg Woffington" and "Art" have but one purpose, — to prove the fact, which no person of common sense could ever have doubted, that no profession, not even the stage, can totally obliterate all feminine feeling ; in other words, that nature is stronger than the trammels of circumstance. Of the avowed purpose of "Christie Johnstone" we have spoken elsewhere ; and as for "Clouds and Sunshine," Heaven and the author alone can tell why it was ever written.

It will be observed that Mr. Reade's principal characters are, in the end, drawn away from the vanities which have been the subject of his narrative, and are finally led to the adoption of a religious life. Now, whatever Mr. Reade hopes

or intends by thus affixing an adjunct of virtuous old age to his somewhat slippery subjects, — running, as it were, his several trains, after many delays at way-stations, to a religious terminus, — he will fail, for this reason: the permanent influence of a story is not found in the interjectional sentiments of the author, nor in the formal moral tracked to the end, as in the fables in antique school-books, but in the subject-matter of the book, in the life and actions of its heroes and heroines, — in the general drift and tone, rather than in the occasional, brief, and evidently forced expressions of opinion by the author. Peg Woffington may teach the world that a profession which submerges the virtues of a weak character, cannot wholly quench the good instincts of a strong one; but she will never lead devotees to the shrine she finally reached herself, — the feet of John Wesley! Christie Johnstone may, in the last half-page of her history, induce her husband and children to revere the written revelation; but she will live in the reader's memory only as the shrewd, and not over-honest fishwife, and the daring woman, — the Grace Darling of fictitious history, — never as a preceptress of religious truth.

Since 1852, Mr. Reade has sent forth three volumes, embracing four tales, which argues a certain kind of popularity, but possibly indicates only that spasmodic species of success which sometimes overtakes a writer, to the equal astonishment of himself and his publishers. That the works we have discussed will not attain to any lasting distinction may safely be predicted, for the simple reason that there is neither any phase of character portrayed, nor sentiment, opinion, or principle enunciated, which has not been more happily accomplished by greater word-artists. Now, instead of issuing three books in three years, why will not Mr. Reade try to build up a permanent fame by putting the labor of three years into one book? Instead of giving us the mere outlines of human figures, why will he not present us with the finished fulness of corporeal frames, and the symmetrical structure of complete human lives, — complete so far as the illustration of peculiarities of character requires? And instead of the episodical pictures which we have here, the impressions of which will be found commensurately fleeting, why will he not depict a connected

series of events, culminating to some worthy purpose, and sufficiently continuous to remain ever after part of the mind's furniture, to which the memory shall instinctively revert in its search of figures to exemplify the lessons it would illustrate? If Mr. Reade writes for fame, he will yet do something like this; but if writing is with him merely a profession, a means of living, he will of course continue to consult the market, and turn off his wares as rapidly as possible, before he and they become unfashionable.

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- ART. V. — 1. *An Account of the Life, Opinions, and Writings of JOHN MILTON. With an Introduction to Paradise Lost.* By THOMAS KEIGHTLEY. London: Chapman and Hall. 1855. 8vo. pp. 484.
2. *MILTON. A Sheaf of Gleanings after his Biographers and Annotators.* By JOSEPH HUNTER. London: John Russell Smith. 1850. 12mo. pp. 72.
3. *The Poetical Works of JOHN MILTON, with a Life by* REV. JOHN MITFORD. Boston: Little, Brown, & Co. 1854. 3 vols.

IT is for no lack of prejudice and caprice in commentators, controversialists, and unfledged philologists, that the works of many of our older writers have not been frittered away as to their original strength and purity, and nothing left but a few fragments, which, rescued from the accumulating slime by curious hands, might afford some idea of the primitive formation. Yet, thanks to the enduring offspring of the press, we can in most cases, in English literature, turn from the deposit left by the retreating tide of each generation, to the original rock, which, thrown up on its own shore, no succeeding waves have reached. To those who with veneration care and love seek to protect this rock from sacrilegious hands, to point out the rich veins or the concealed gems, we cannot be too grateful; and when amongst the increasing drift they seek to preserve whatever of value may have been washed up by the sea of letters, and the results are clearly placed before us for